



9th Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion Conference, Melbourne, Australia

Rashid Ahmed

Department of Psychology, University of the Western Cape

Mohamed Seedat

UNISA Institute for Social and Health Sciences and
MRC–UNISA Crime, Violence and Injury Lead Programme

Shahnaaz Suffla

MRC–UNISA Crime, Violence and Injury Lead Programme

The 9th Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion Conference was held in Melbourne, Australia, from 24 to 26 July 2009. This conference formed part of a series of conferences initiated in 1993 by the Monash University's Accident Research Centre (MOARC) in partnership with the Australian Injury Prevention Network and other agencies. Following collective experience in the sector, the conference was focused on childhood injury, drowning/water safety, occupational injuries, transport safety, injury data systems, trauma care, policy and programme evaluations, and violence, alcohol and suicide. The conference theme *Applying the Science: An Integrated Approach* emphasised the urgent "... need to apply a renewed and re-invigorated focus to injury as the leading and most preventable cause of death in young people in Australia and our region, and heavy burden in all age groups". As expected, the majority of the participants were Australian. Contributors also included New Zealanders, Vietnamese and four South Africans, which is reflective of an emerging partnership between MOARC and the Medical Research Council–University of South Africa (MRC–UNISA) Crime, Violence and Injury Lead Programme (CVI).

The opening sessions succeeded in responding to the call of the conference theme. Of the opening presentations, one highlighted the need to look at data, as well as the broader context of policy formulation. The other challenged some of the conventional wisdom and outputs in injury presentation work. The speaker argued that the academic space in which prevention messages are being delivered reach only a small audience. Drawing on an empirical analysis of media, he suggested that the popular media remains one of the most powerful and influential spaces for safety messages, yet it remains under-utilised by researchers and practitioners. He then suggested how an understanding of media communication could help researchers and practitioners to deliver more effective safety messages.

The opening session included a debate centred on the theme "Too much evidence is never enough". Mohamed Seedat, Margie Peden and Ali Dhansay assumed an affirmative position in the debate, while Gordon Smith, Lois Fingerhut and Yvette Holder adopted a negative position. The debate, conducted in a light-hearted manner by the respondents, highlighted the key issues to be considered in research translation and policy. The chair, Prof Freiberg, complemented this approach with a witty and hilarious facilitation process.

The debate highlighted the need to balance research and prevention, a balance not always easily achieved. Research translation is influenced by contextual, social actor, content and process factors. The opening sessions set the context for the rest of the conference. They succeeded in broadening the parameters of what is conventionally considered the disciplinary boundary of injury prevention and safety promotion. The opening session concluded with the Australian launch of the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) World Report on Child Injury Prevention by Her Excellency, Ms Quentin Bryce AC, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia.

Days two and three consisted of an opening plenary/keynote address followed by the oral and poster presentations. The oral presentations were parallel sessions organised by theme, allowing participants to attend sessions pertaining to their areas of interest. The poster presentations were presented innovatively, with presenters being given an opportunity, through brief PowerPoint presentations, to introduce their posters to the participants after which the conventional poster display followed. This was helpful as it gave the presenters an opportunity to showcase their work prior to the poster display and it gave delegates an opportunity to obtain an overview and focus on their areas of interest.

Presentations were generally of a high quality and included presentations by both researchers and practitioners. The sessions that pushed the boundaries of the more mainstream approaches to public health were the highlights. Prof Rod McClure's presentation, titled "Is it time to let go of the public health approach to injury prevention", suggested that the field could benefit from critically reviewing our current approaches to develop fresher and newer ways to stimulate growth in the sector. He suggested that in spite of many advances the field is still dominated by individual behavioural change models. The presentation by Alison Milner, titled "The relationship between globalisation, suicide and national contexts: The need for a public health approach", suggested that the global context exerts an influence on national public health phenomena. This research found that globalisation was directly related to suicide mortality over the period 1980–2006. Her data suggested that the parameters for suicide prevention needed to include processes of globalisation. Mohammed Seedat's presentation, titled "The Global Peace Index: Why should injury prevention consider it", similarly suggested that peace promotion be integrated into injury prevention. His presentation focused on the utility and appropriateness of the Global Peace Index for injury prevention.

The breadth of the session themes was helpful to the extent that the sessions drew in many injury practitioners and researchers. This was complemented by themes with more specific foci. The specific focus on alcohol within the theme "Violence, alcohol and suicide", emphasised the importance of this risk factor in injury. Similarly, the focus on falls among the elderly, in the thematic track "Falls and the older person", highlighted the need to focus on specific high-risk populations. The scientific aspects of the programme were matched by a high level of organisation and plentiful opportunity for social and professional exchanges. While the conference was regional, the lessons and some of the inter-connections were more global.